

ORM NEWS

From the Office of the
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Resolution Management
Department of Veterans Affairs



October 2003

From the Deputy Assistant Secretary



Looking at the Possibilities

Our past year has been marked by change; changes in the way ORM is organized, to the programs and services we offer, in exploring new ways to enhance the training we offer to employees and our customers, in creating new partnerships with other elements of VA and with non-VA organizations; all with the goal of helping us to become a more effective and efficient organization.

As we go into the new fiscal year, I want us to look at the possibilities for achieving our goals through new and creative methods and not dwell on perceived obstacles that present themselves whenever attempting something new; to move in a new direction.

Change can be defined as a transformation to new ways of achieving a goal, to attempting the untried, to finding a different way to reach an objective. Its human nature to look at change as a challenge, and resist it, because it asks us to step away from the familiar, to give up something we've become comfortable with for something new and, sometimes, untested.

Dynamic organizations embrace change and constantly evaluate what they are doing and how they are doing it. Does it work? Can it be done differently, more efficiently? What are the costs in continuing to do it the old way? Can we improve on these costs by finding new and more efficient ways to achieve our goals?

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Can we improve how we process complaints to lower the costs? How can we make these improvements? What's available to us to move ORM into the future? How can we get there and become a more dynamic and effective organization? These are the challenges I set forth for myself and for ORM as an organization.

We each play a part in this process. We should look for the possibilities in finding new and creative ways to accomplish our goals; to see the benefits, to us individually, and as an organization, in finding better ways to deliver our services and, ultimately, improving ORM as an organization.

This is a challenge I see for us in 2004. I'm asking each of you to join me in this effort, to see the changes we are attempting as the next step in the evolution of ORM. The goal of these changes is to improve how we deliver our services and, in doing so, provide the highest quality service to our customers.

Let's look for ways to achieve our goals, find ways to be successful and focus less time on why we will not be successful. Maybe what was not successful in the past will be successful today. Maybe we were not ready to do what was possible in the past and with a change of attitude we will look more for the opportunities and less at the difficulties. That will make a great difference in the success or failure of our efforts.

James S. Jones ■

Program Highlights

Protect the Privacy of Personal Information - Privacy Act Training for New Employees

Privacy Program Policy (Directive 6502) requires new VA hires to receive Privacy Awareness training. Instructions were recently issued to ORM managers concerning this requirement.

As VA employees, we are expected to maintain high standards of performance. In the performance of your duties many of you will view, exchange, and manage the personal information of complainants in the EEO complaint process, other VA employees, colleagues, and in some cases veterans. This information could be confidential complaint information, or other personal information collected in the performance of your duties. It's important that everyone understand that:

Privacy is EVERYONE'S Business!

What does *that* mean? Simple. It means that it is your obligation as a VA employee to protect the privacy of personal information. Also, it's the law. You can be disciplined, fined or even imprisoned for willfully and/or accidentally divulging protected personal information, health information, or information that can determine individual identity without proper authority.

There are a number of rules, regulations, and procedures that you should be aware of when handling personal information. As a result, VA has created a training course that you can complete at your computer. This training will familiarize you with the rules, procedures, and laws you need to know in order to protect the privacy of personal information.

Training Information

The VA General Employee Privacy Awareness Course takes about 30 minutes to complete, and provides comprehensive information on why privacy is important, how to properly manage personal information in the workplace, and what to do if you encounter a privacy-related violation.

The course is available at vaww.privacyawareness.aac.va.gov for all non-VHA employees and contractors. Please notify either Lewis Henson or Charlene Jones, of the Learning Resources Center via email, upon completion.

If you have any additional questions concerning this training, call the ORM Privacy/ FOIA staff at 202-501-2800 or the Learning Resources Center staff at 727-319-1197. Tyrone Eddins is the Privacy/Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Officer for ORM. ■

Implementation of the No FEAR Act

By Alison Mangels, Office of the COO

President Bush signed the Notification and Federal Employee Anti-discrimination and Retaliation (No FEAR) Act into law on May 15, 2002. Its purpose is to hold Federal agencies more accountable for employment discrimination, retaliation, and whistleblower protection. The Act becomes effective on October 1, 2003.

Title II of the Act requires Federal agencies to reimburse the Judgment Fund for any monies paid out in judgments, awards, or compromise settlements to federal employees, former federal employees, and applicants for federal employment for any of the following claims: Title VII, Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), Rehabilitation Act, Fair Labor Standards Act, Whistleblower Act, and prohibitions of discrimination based on marital status or political affiliation, and anything covered by Merit System Protection Board (MSPB). This reimbursement applies only to those cases that go to U.S. District Court. Federal Agencies are already responsible for paying for settlements or final agency decisions made during the administrative EEO process.

Title II also requires written notification of the rights and protections afforded by the Act be made available to employees, former employees and applicants for employment. A posting on the Internet site of the Federal agency may satisfy this requirement. Each Federal Agency must also provide employees training regarding the rights and remedies applicable under the No FEAR Act.

There are two reporting requirements in the Act. The first is outlined in Title II, and is related to those cases that are filed in U.S. District Court. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has jurisdiction for the implementation of Title II and is preparing guidance, which will be issued in stages. The first stage of the guidance, which will be released in early October 2003, lays out the reimbursement procedures that agencies must

follow when they tap the Treasury fund to pay legal bills in bias and whistle-blower cases.

Title III of the Act has the biggest impact on ORM because it requires agencies to post certain statistical information on their public Web sites concerning complaints of employment discrimination filed with them under 29 C.F.R 1614. On August 5, 2003, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued an interim final rule which tells Federal agencies what information to post, how to post it, and when to post it. The following information must be posted.

- ❑ Number of complaints filed.
- ❑ Number of individuals who filed.
- ❑ Bases raised in complaints.
- ❑ Issues raised in complaints.
- ❑ Processing time for each stage of the process.
- ❑ Findings of discrimination sorted by basis and whether there was a hearing.
- ❑ Findings of discrimination sorted by issue and whether there was a hearing.
- ❑ Number of pending complaints that were filed in prior fiscal years.

When posting data for a current fiscal year, the Act requires the posting on a year to date basis, updated quarterly. When posting data for prior years, the Act requires the posting on a fiscal year basis. The first posting of data is required by January 31, 2004. The first posting will include fiscal year to date data, in addition to the year-end data for the five immediately proceeding fiscal years.

It is important that accurate, current, and complete complaint data is entered into the Web Based Tracking System (WBTS) to ensure the accuracy of the information ORM will provide in response to the reporting requirements of the No FEAR Act,

ORM will meet with the Office of General Counsel (OGC), Office of Human Resource Management (OHRM), Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication (OEDCA), Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), National Cemetery Administration (NCA), and Inspector General (IG) in late September to discuss VA compliance with the requirements of the Act.

Look for future articles on this subject as more information becomes available. ■

Lyons Regional EEO Conference

By Robyn Labombarda, Lyons Field Office

The Lyons Field Office held a Regional EEO Conference in Boston, Massachusetts September 9-11, 2003. The theme of the conference was "Alternative Bridges to Resolution". Various presenters spoke on different aspects of that theme, including VA's ADR Program, Peer Mediation, ADR Best Practices, and Preparing Successful Settlement Agreements. The presenters included top officials from Washington as well as representatives from the various agencies that utilize ORM's services, including the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Regional Counsel and the Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication (OEDCA). Other topics presented during the Conference included Succession Planning, ORM Customer Service Initiatives, as well as Complaint Processing and Adjudication. Judge Gary Krump, Chairman and Chief Administrative Judge of the Board of Contract Appeals, delivered the keynote luncheon speech.

A special breakout session for directors and upper management allowed these individuals to have frank discussions with high-level Washington officials. These officials included Judge Krump; Nevin Weaver, Chief of Staff Office of the Under Secretary for Health; Dennis "Max" Lewis, Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health/Operations and Management-Veterans Health Administration;



Armando Rodriguez, Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity; and James Jones, the Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for ORM.

The Conference concluded with a panel consisting of James Jones, DAS for ORM, Malcolm Porter, Chief Operating Office for ORM, and Ms. Rosa Franco, Regional EEO Manager, responding to questions from the audience regarding ORM and the EEO process. The Conference was well attended by management, labor and union representatives. A total 127 individuals, including ORM staff, attended. The feedback from the attendees was positive regarding the importance of the topics and information presented. Overall, the Conference was a success and the Lyons Field Office looks forward to hosting another Regional EEO Conference in fiscal year 2005. ■

Executive Leadership Program

The Executive Leadership Program (ELP), sponsored by the Graduate School, USDA, is a 12-month nationwide program open to individuals at the GS 11-13 levels who have little or no supervisory experience. ELP provides residential training, developmental work experiences, needs assessment and career planning, which gives participants the skills, experience and exposure to move into positions of more responsibility. This program will help participants acquire the skills needed to become successful leaders and managers within the federal government.

Gwendolyn (Gwen) Gantt, EEO Investigator with the Washington Field Office, has been accepted in the 2004 ELP.



During the one-week program orientation in September 2003, Gwen joined a team with participants from eight other government agencies who will research customer service as their team project. Gwen was instrumental in the selection of customer service as the team's project. Part of the planning for this initiative was the selection of a subject matter expert who will serve as the team's Executive Team Leader. **Brenda Lewis**, ORM's Customer Service Manager, was selected, out of five candidates, to serve as the Executive Team Leader for Gwen's group.

Gwen, who in addition to being an EEO investigator is also a certified mediator, hopes her participation in this program will enable her to enhance her skills and knowledge in a variety of areas. These include:

- ❑ Gaining critical information for long-term career planning and development.
- ❑ Insight and knowledge about the role of a federal executive through mentoring.
- ❑ Establishing formal/informal support networks for professional development.
- ❑ Opportunities for personal interaction with high-level executives.
- ❑ Strengthening her interpersonal skills.

Congratulations to **Gwen** for her selection as a participant in the Executive Leadership Program and to **Brenda Lewis** for her selection as an Executive Team Leader in support of this beneficial program.

Additional information on this program can be found at the Executive Leadership Program Web site:

http://grad.usda.gov/programs_services/lda/welp.cfm. ■

Workforce Diversity Leadership Seminar

By Pat Johnson, Office of Policy & Compliance

On September 15, 2003, **Linda Heard** (Office of the COO), along with **Fred Smith** and **Arlene Adedeji** of the Washington Field Office, and I attended a 2-part Leadership Seminar Series entitled, “Workplace Diversity: Making Heads Count”, sponsored by the US Department of Commerce Office of Civil Rights, Office of Human Resources Management, and the US Agency for International Development, Office of Equal Opportunity Programs. The morning session of the seminar was held at the Ronald Reagan Building and the afternoon session at the US Department of Commerce in Washington, DC.

This seminar focused on understanding the value of a diversified workforce and the changing face of the American workplace. Participants were encouraged to learn how to strengthen their work and personal relationships by effectively managing diversity.



Dr. Samuel Betances, Senior Consultant of Souder, Betances and Associates, Inc., Chicago, Illinois was the featured speaker. He spoke on “The Benefits and Values of Diversity” and “Diversity Awareness.” He pointed out, “Gratitude must precede grievances when the end goal is strengthening teams.”

Important points discussed during the seminars included:

- ❑ Diversity equals enhanced mission and bottom-line options when we can celebrate, tolerate, and eliminate discrimination in the workplace,
- ❑ The differences between equal employment opportunity and diversity.
- ❑ Diversity training is needed because (1) Shifts in the population creates tension in organizations, (2) These tensions tend to challenge our conditioning and perceptions about the nature of things and (3) These tensions create both dangers and opportunities and,
- ❑ Teaching and training reduces fear. The bottom-line issue for diversity education is to make this information accessible to everyone.

Diversity and compliance initiatives are essential in organizations. The mission of each is different; yet they compliment each other because each organizational culture creates inclusive team concepts as shown in the following chart:

EEO Compliance	<i>Diversity Initiatives</i>
Is enforced by Law	Are implemented by Policy
Responds to the Challenges of ending discrimination	Respond to the Challenge of embracing demographic changes
Seeks changes in individual behavior	Seeks changes in the Organizational culture
Ensures equitable treatment for protected classes in Organization	Ensures diversity of thought at every level of the Organization
“How to’s” can be learned from experts teaching compliance requirements to members of the Organization	“How to’s” must be learned from members of the Organization who engage in identifying and targeting barriers.

Diversity initiatives are useful options; however, diversity training is not the exclusive answer. Be cautious of focusing on a single issue, it tends to contribute to faulty assumptions about the role of diversity in the workplace. Also be wary of putting a racial or gender face to the issue.

Dr. Betances advises taking a more holistic approach to diversity. Diversity issues have more to do with how managers might create a hospitable climate that reduces dysfunctional tensions by promoting respect, upward mobility, and productive teamwork. This will serve as a powerful incentive for employees to see their “organization” as an employer of choice and for the organization to demonstrate its commitment to diversity through “tell me, show me, and involve me, techniques. ■

Office Notes

Washington Field Office: Please welcome our new Intake Specialist, [David Williams](#), who comes to ORM from the Treasury Department.

[Anthony Metcalf](#), EEO Counselor, was recently diagnosed with a brain tumor and will have surgery on October 23, 2003. In addition to your prayers for his successful recovery, Anthony will be in need of leave donations to assist him while he is out on sick leave for six weeks or more. Anyone wishing to donate leave can contact Vanessa Deal at (202) 501-2859 for more information.

Bay Pines Field Office: The Bay Pines Field Office and our Learning Resources Division recently conducted Mediation Training in Puerto Rico. This training was part of ORM's effort to help VA facilities and other government agencies to establish a Shared Neutrals Mediation Program in Puerto Rico. Attendees included employees from the VA Medical Center, Regional Office, and National Cemetery in Puerto Rico. Other attendees included employees of the Federal Emergency Management Authority, U.S. District Attorneys Office, Fort Buchanan Military Base, U.S. District Court, U.S. Customs Service, and the Office of Personal Management (OPM).

[John Henley](#), EEO Counselor (Lake City Satellite Office), has been promoted to EEO Investigator at the Bay Pines Field Office. His promotion was effective 9/22/03. Congratulations and Good Luck to John.

Human Resources: [Zakia Batchelor](#) has joined our HR staff as a Human Resource Specialist. She was formally an EEO Specialist for the Department of Homeland Security, Office of EEO, Headquarters Servicing Division. Ms. Batchelor served 7 years in the United States Air Force where she obtained her Masters in Human Resource Management and Development and a Bachelor's in Business Management from National Louis University. She is currently enlisted in the United States Air Force Reserves as a Human Resource Training Manager for the Medical Field. Ms. Batchelor currently resides in Clinton, Maryland with her son, Zaveon, who has just turned 5 months old."

Cleveland Field Office: Congratulations to [Lori McManus](#), daughter of [Carolyn McManus](#), EEO Program Assistant (Worker Trainee) at ORM Hines, Hines, IL, who was nominated and inducted into "Who's Who Among American High School Students" in 2003, and whose name and biography was published in the 2003 edition of "The National Honor Roll Society" for having achieved academic excellence in obtaining a 4.0 GPA in her senior year of high school. Lori is 18 years old and is currently a freshman at Illinois State University, Normal, IL in pursuit of a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. She is a recipient of a 2003 Federal Employee Education Assistance (FEEA) scholarship in addition to numerous private scholarships. ■

A Soldier's Welcome Home

By Elizabeth "Liz" Hawkins

Office of Policy and Compliance



Vernet Fraser

During lunch on August 26, 2003, Earnestine Richardson and I were reminiscing about our co-worker and friend, **Vernet Fraser**, who has been on active duty in Kuwait since February 2003.

Earnestine mentioned how she believed he would arrive back in the office unannounced; ready to get back right back to work. After discussing this further she said, "No, he's not that devious." Well, low and behold, not an hour later, I answered the telephone,

"Office of Resolution Management, this is Liz." A familiar voice replied, "Hello Liz, do you know who this is?" Well for those who know Vernet, and have spoken to him, you're familiar with his distinctive South American accent. "Vernet!" I shouted. "Where are you?" Somehow I knew he was home, but just couldn't believe the irony of my conversation with Earnestine just minutes before his call. "I'm in Bowie, Maryland," he answered. At this point I was so overwhelmed with glee, that the rest of our conversation was a blur. I placed him on hold, and ran around telling everyone I could find that he was home for two weeks of rest and relaxation, and to come to the phone to say "Hi." Unfortunately, only a few employees were around at the time, because many were attending the Excel Conference in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Plans were expeditiously set in motion for Vernet's visit to the office on Thursday, August 28th. Earnestine picked up a sheet cake, and commissioned a street artist to draw a cartoon character of him. The likeness is amazing. The Sunshine Fund donated a Boston cream pie and a cheesecake, and Denise Bond provided patriotic decorations that would make Uncle Sam himself proud. Lillette Turner finagled a last minute reservation at McCormick and Schmick's Seafood Restaurant, nabbing a cozy booth for six, and getting the words "Welcome Home Vernet" printed on the menu. She also commissioned Mr. Melvin Daley, Office of Administration, to create a magnificent banner for Vernet.

On Thursday, I anxiously awaited Vernet's arrival. I was the only Policy and Compliance staff member available at the time of his arrival. From a distance, I heard Denise Bond scream with excitement. That was my cue. I grabbed my camera and ran towards the reception area. I took a picture of Vernet and Denise

embracing. Then I got my own hug from him. He looked great, and was sporting his usual award-winning smile. As he made his way further into the office, LaMont Johnson, ADR Coordinator, and Ronnica Snowden, Washington, DC Field Office, greeted him. While he met with them, I decided to call my mother so she could speak to him. She told him how glad she was that he was home, and that she had been praying for him. I also called my friend Tina Waters, a Smithsonian Institute employee. She had sent several email messages to him while he was overseas.

When we arrived at the restaurant, the maitre d' greeted Vernet with a handshake and welcomed him back home. He also told him how proud he was to have him dine at his restaurant. Our waiter also welcomed him and greeted him with a salute. After lunch, we all went over to VA Central Office to visit and surprise our former supervisor, Joan Hanson. She was thrilled to see him.



Welcome Home Vernet

and blue streamers, was priceless. He was truly honored and humbled by it all. When asked if it would be difficult to return to the Kuwait he replied, "no." He said, "at first it was scary because I didn't know what I was going into." "But now I know what I'm going back to." Vernet also said that he does not concern himself with the politics of the war. He says that while he is in Kuwait, he will protect himself and his military brothers and sisters. He believes he will return home for good early next year.

Vernet and his lovely wife, Beverly took a well-deserved vacation in Las Vegas during the Labor Day weekend. He returned to active duty on September 8th. He asked that we convey his sincere gratitude to all of ORM for the email messages, cards, letters, and care packages. We ask that you please keep our colleague in your prayers. You may send an email message to Vernet at vernet.fraser@us.army.mil. ■

We returned to the office and informed Vernet that we had an all employees meeting with the DAS at 2:00 p.m. We invited him to join us. Earlier, we informed our out-based staff, Gina Suppa, Maria Ramos, and Michelle McNeill, that we needed to have a brief teleconference meeting with them. We withheld the information about Vernet being home in order to surprise them.

The look on Vernet's face as he entered the conference room, which was decorated with a flag, balloons as well as red, white



Vernet with his very own stars and stripes.

Did You Know?

Operation Tribute to Freedom Seeks Community Partnership to Honor the Military

WASHINGTON D.C., -- As military men and women return home from fighting the global war on terrorism, citizens and communities across American are greeting them with public displays of gratitude for their service and sacrifices.

Supporting and taking note of local community celebrations and observances, including upcoming Veteran's Day events, or any event or individual act that pays tribute to the military, is what Operation Tribute to Freedom (OTF) is all about. The OTF initiative sprang from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's office in May and is intended to achieve three major goals: thanking servicemen and women, strengthening the bond between American citizens and the military, and reminding everyone that the war on terrorism is not over.

OTF has joint speaker teams available for event organizers wishing to include the military in their activities. The speaker teams consists of veterans from military operations supporting the Global War on Terrorism, who are willing to talk about their experiences at community events.

Community groups looking for military involvement and OTF posters for their events can get assistance by contacting the OTF task force at: www.defendamerica.mil/oft. From the home page, click on "Request Event Support" or "Download."

The Web site also offers groups or individuals an avenue for sharing what they've done, or plan to do, to honor military men and women. If you are one of the thousands of Americans who have flown a flag, attended a rally, helped organize a parade, emailed a thank you, or attended a homecoming for a member of America's military forces, you can officially become part of America's nationwide Tribute to Freedom by clicking on the "Join the Team" option.

For questions and additional information contact CPT Robert Kuster at (703) 602-0909, or by email at Robert.kuster@hqda.army.mil.

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